

VZCZCXRO4452

OO RUEHBC RUEHDE RUEHDH RUEHDIR RUEHIHL RUEHKUK RUEHTRO

DE RUEHGB #2103/01 2161552

ZNY CCCCC ZZH

O 041552Z AUG 09

FM AMEMBASSY BAGHDAD

TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 4203

INFO RUCNIRA/IRAN COLLECTIVE

RUCNRAQ/IRAQ COLLECTIVE

RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 0849

RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA 0326

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BAGHDAD 002103

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 08/04/2019

TAGS: PHUM PTER PGOV IR IZ

SUBJECT: MEK IN CAMP ASHRAF: MEK ON HUNGER STRIKE, REFUSING FOOD SHIPMENTS FROM GOI

REF: BAGHDAD 2093 AND PREVIOUS

Classified By: A/PMA W.S. Reid III for reasons 1.4(b)&(d).

¶1. (C) Summary. On August 4, Iraqi humanitarian situation commander in Ashraf COL Sa'di Habib Hussein al-Dulaymi informed USG officials that he had visited the Mujahideen-e-Khalq (MEK) detainees at the detention facility in Khalis on August 3, stating that the MEK detainees have refused food and medical care. The MEK detainees claimed to be on a hunger strike, but have accepted tea and water, COL Sa'di said. Meanwhile in Ashraf, MEK residents have refused acceptance of a food shipment from the GOI, claiming also to be on a hunger strike. It is unclear how many of the residents of Ashraf are involved in the hunger strike. U.S. forces are attempting to gather more information as to the how many residents of Ashraf are on the hunger strike. COL Sa'di discredited rumors of mass graves located in Ashraf, claiming the graves in the Ashraf cemetery contained the remains of MEK residents with Iraqi names and stating there is no evidence of mass graves in Ashraf. COL Sa'di offered to reduce the number of forces inside Ashraf to approximately 70 personnel, if the MEK residents of Ashraf would agree not to attack the Iraqi police (IP) station and its forces. End Summary.

¶2. (C) On August 4, USG officials met with COL Sa'di in Ashraf to discuss the GOI's treatment of the MEK detainees at the facility in Khalis. COL Sa'di assured USG officials that he had visited the facility in Khalis on August 3. He stated the detainees are being treated humanely, but stated the MEK detainees were currently on a hunger strike and were refusing medical treatment for their injuries (reftel). COL Sa'di informed USG officials that he had advised the IP to continue to treat the detainees in a humane manner, claiming that this is important as "they are guests in Iraq." (Note: The MEK, originally founded in Iran in 1965 as a group opposed to the rule of the Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, transferred its headquarters to Iraq in 1986, receiving military and financial support from Saddam Hussein until 2003. Since 1997, the U.S. has designated the MEK as a terrorist organization. End Note.)

¶3. (C) COL Sa'di informed USG officials that the MEK residents in Ashraf were also on a hunger strike and have refused a food shipment that was sent by the GOI. (Note: The refusal of the food shipment may be the result of a logistical battle between the MEK and the GOI, as the GOI is no longer allowing shipments through the main gate and is requiring that all shipments enter through a side gate. End Note.) (Comment: Although the food shipment appears to be a logistical battle, the MEK hunger strike appears to be a coordinated effort on the part of the local MEK and their political arm, the National Council of Resistance of Iran (NCRI), to gain international sympathy and concern for their current situation in Ashraf. However, it should be noted, there is no evidence that the MEK detainees are in contact at

this time with the MEK residents of Ashraf. End Comment.)

¶4. (C) Reports of mass graves in Ashraf are false, said COL Sa'di. To his knowledge, there is a cemetery in Ashraf, but it contains the remains of MEK residents and not those of any other persons. He stated that the rumor may have started because the names on some of the tombstones are Iraqi names, but there is no evidence there are any Kuwaiti nationals buried in Ashraf.  
Qburied in Ashraf.

¶5. (C) COL Sa'di informed USG officials that the bulk of GOI forces could be redeployed out of Ashraf, if the MEK agreed to accept the IP station and Iraqi presence. He stated that if they agreed to do this, the residual force inside Ashraf would number approximately 70 IP. He reiterated the GOI's intent to relocate the MEK residents to Camp Echo in November when the base is vacated by U.S. forces.

¶6. (C) Comment. The GOI continued to assure the USG that it will treat the MEK residents in a humane manner, consistent with Iraqi laws, the Constitution and its international obligations. However, it appears the residents of Ashraf are still stubbornly refusing to communicate with COL Sa'di and the GOI. A possible coordinated hunger strike among both the residents of Ashraf and the MEK detainees in GOI custody in Khalis can be described as political melodrama written and staged by the political arm of the MEK, the NCRI. Their intention may be to garner international sympathy for the MEK and increase international animosity toward the GOI. While the GOI remains committed to relocating the MEK, the MEK continue their PR blitzkrieg, believing that by eliciting international sympathy, they will sway public opinion against

BAGHDAD 00002103 002 OF 002

the GOI, who in turn will reconsider their relocation plan. The lack of a well-thought-out plan by the GOI and the MEK's intransigence has the making of renewed violent confrontation. End Comment.

HILL